The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919

Written by HAHS Staff

Just over 100 years ago, a major illness swept around the world. In 1918 and 1919, this highly contagious flu became known as "Spanish Influenza." While the virus did not necessarily start in Spain, that country was the hardest hit by the disease. The impact of this pandemic was huge, with numbers of people dying all around the world from the disease.

Cities closed down schools and businesses, and people were asked to wear face masks to help stop the spread of germs. If you got sick, you would feel like you had the flu - cold, sniffles, aches, a fever. Eventually, the germs would move into your lungs and give you *pneumonia*. Pneumonia is when your lungs fill with fluid and it becomes hard to breathe. This is similar to how the current coronavirus, COVID-19, makes you sick. And this is why now, as then, we are cancelling events and activities that might help to spread the germs.

During the Spanish Flu pandemic, there were so many sick people that they didn't all fit into the hospitals. In Oakland, they turned the Municipal Auditorium into a makeshift hospital to treat influenza patients. People in the Hayward area also had to adapt to the illness. On October 18, 1918, Hayward High School cancelled or postponed all of their athletic events and games.

A view of the corner of B and Main Street c.1918. This is what the downtown area looked like at the time of the Spanish Influenza pandemic. The City Council often met on the second floor of the building to the far right.

Oakland Mayor John Davies ordered the closure of movie theaters, churches, and schools.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? We do not know for sure if all schools and businesses were closed in Hayward, but it is very likely. [The California State Board of Health's January 1919 Bulletin](#) recommended closing places where people gather. It also recommended that people should wear

gauze face masks. The report also included a list of symptoms and told people what to do if they thought they were sick with the Spanish Flu.

Hayward's health officer at the time of the 1918 pandemic was Dr. Fredrick W. Browning. Dr. Browning gave orders and suggestions to help slow the spread of the disease. He suggested that everyone should wear face masks to help stop the spread of germs, and he passed out a booklet with information about how to stay well.

A view of inside the council chambers, 1912. Hayward's Health Officer, Dr. Browning, is the man standing furthest to the right.

Just over one-hundred years later the Hayward area is faced with a similar disease. This time our population is much larger and we have much better

access to information on how to treat and stop the disease. We may not have a cure or a vaccine against this illness yet, but we have a better idea of what to do to slow the spread of the disease. In 1918, many people became sick, and some of them died. If we all work together to follow the guidelines our health officials are giving us now, we can help keep that from happening again.

(Note: an *epidemic* is an illness that has one *epicenter* or point of spread. A virus becomes *pandemic* - "pan-" means "all" - when it has spread across many countries and affects a large number of people.)